also available using the FTP protocol via Flash PROM. Additional features include port priority, port aggregation (multi-link), port mirroring for RMON probes, and link aggregation and redundancy where up to 8 ports can be configured as a single 800 Mbit link.

[0067] When considering how the present invention is different from the state of the art, the present invention can also hook the networking functions into a server to make network functions more seamless. In other words, instead of just operating as a Network Interface Card (NIC) tied into a switch or router, the present invention provides full control over the switch/router functions. This approach is different from the state of the art because no one has previously tried to provide this type of interface that enables a third party to load their own components into a box that is providing some type of network function. In fact, this approach is antithetical to the business model of any other network function provider. For it is the desire of suppliers of network functions that the user not try to add hardware or software components of a third party into their own box. It will potentially decrease their own revenue stream.

Obviously, this type of approach severely limits trying to build a "best of class" network if a user can only install certain brands of products when the overiding feature of interoperability is a must.

[0068] Thus, the present invention performs the unique function of being an integrator of network products that have previously required separate boxes or isolated operation in order to function. Advantageously, the present invention does not have to try and provide any of the network functions themselves, but instead provides a box that enables network cards performing all manner of functions to be disposed therein, while providing the hardware and software to make interconnections between the different network cards. Thus, even though the present invention does provide switch/router capabilities, even these functions can be replaced or enhanced by the addition a third party switch or router card.

[0069] One of the novel aspects of the invention is that because the present invention is not trying to duplicate the functions of a proprietary firewall, call it Firewall A, there are no licensing fees to be paid because Firewall A is purchased and put into the Open IP Services

Platform 30 as a separate add-in component. The Open IP Services Platform 30 thus provides all of the functionality of Firewall A because it includes Firewall A inside it. Likewise, Load Balancer B is manufactured by a different company, is purchased, and disposed within the Open IP Services Platform 30 next to Firewall A. Firewall A and Load Balancer B now provide all of their functionality in a single box. All interconnections between them are provide by the present invention, and are configurable down to a port-by-port basis.

[0070] Another novel aspect of the invention is that it prevents exclusivity of function. Suppose that the manufacturer of Firewall A enters into an exclusive contract such that it is no longer available for use in the Open IP Services Platform 30. Advantageously, Firewall A is removed and Firewall B is put in its slot. After loading Firewall B's drivers, it is likely that no other configuration of Firewall B will be required. The firewall functions will operate as before.

[0071] It is another aspect of the invention that most network functions can be added into the Open IP Services Platform 30 without modification. The only requirement is